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Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

30 October 1984

Executive Director

NOTE FOR: Gary Schmitt
Executive Director, PFIAB
FROM: Executive Assistant/Executive
Director

Here is the data you requested
on [redacted]
and on FBIS clearances.

Also attached is more material,
per your request, on Soviet succession.

Please return all of this material
when you are finished with it.

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The Brezhnev Succession: How Things Stand Today

A Research Paper

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*RP 79-10047
February 1979*

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The Brezhnev Succession: How Things Stand Today

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A Research Paper

The author of this paper is [redacted]
[redacted] in the USSR Division, Office of
Political and Regional Analysis. It is an updated
analysis of his earlier memorandum, [redacted]

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[redacted] In producing this
study, [redacted] consulted with many other Soviet
specialists in this agency, but the assessment is the
personal view of the author and is not a formally
coordinated work. [redacted]

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The Brezhnev Succession: How Things Stand Today



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Key Judgments

Brezhnev's success during the past two years in conferring high rank and power on his alter ego, Chernenko, appears to strengthen the stability of the leadership, at least in the two years remaining before the next scheduled party congress.

Brezhnev is clearly unwilling to make substantial arrangements for the succession, or even, apparently, to countenance the efforts of others to maneuver for a favorable position in the coming contest to succeed him.

Kirilenko, despite his age, is the front runner to succeed Brezhnev, but he must continue to walk a tightrope, showing his colleagues that he can think and act independently, yet doing so without losing Brezhnev's confidence.

A critical issue at the moment of succession will be whether Brezhnev's successor will be able to acquire Brezhnev's present authority largely intact: if the powers of the office are substantially degraded, as is probable (at a guess, the chances are perhaps four in five), instability in the leadership may make it difficult for the Politburo to adopt bold new decisions.

The depth of the crisis in the Brezhnev succession is likely to be greater than it was in the Khrushchev succession for several reasons:

- The declining growth of the economy, which will cause acute competition for resources among groups and leaders responsible for civilian consumption (especially agriculture), heavy industry, and defense.
- Brezhnev's failure to take measures to order his succession.

- The need for renewal of the aging leadership, which will increase the stakes in the succession and intensify the attendant political struggle.

A new leadership that is committed to dealing with the country's economic ills would probably seek improved relations with the United States; but one that found the economic problems intractable might concentrate on improving the Soviet military position and seek to extend Soviet influence and power. Even so, the traditional Bolshevik injunction against "adventurism" would presumably be observed.



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The Brezhnev Succession: How Things Stand Today

The Current Situation

Brezhnev's power today probably gives him a decisive voice in matters that are of interest to himself and come to his attention, but because of his reduced vitality some major questions of Soviet politics do not come under his purview. Brezhnev acts as though he expects to remain in office for some time, at least until the next party congress, due in early 1981.¹ He remains jealous of his power and clearly unwilling to make extensive arrangements for the succession or even, apparently, to countenance the efforts of others to maneuver for a favorable position in the coming contest to succeed him. Since 1975 three relatively young and promising leaders—A. N. Shelepin, D. S. Polyanskiy, and K. T. Mazurov—have been removed from the Politburo, and another, K. F. Katushev, was transferred from the Secretariat. Brezhnev's public debate with F. D. Kulakov in February 1977 about Kulakov's experience as a leader and the subsequent relegation of Kulakov in photographs to the outer limits of the Politburo will not encourage new efforts by prospective candidates to position themselves for the succession. [redacted]

Mechanics of the Transfer of Power

A central question in the Brezhnev succession is whether the powers that currently are attached to the office of the general secretary of the Central Committee and afford a measure of stability to the leadership will be reduced when Brezhnev leaves that office. The depth of the crisis of succession will depend heavily on this issue. A severe degradation of the senior secretary's powers occurred when Khrushchev and Brezhnev succeeded to the office. The crucial question is whether sufficient institutionalization of the office has since occurred to produce a different outcome next time. [redacted]

¹ There is a hint of this in Brezhnev's instruction to Gosplan that there must be no reduction in the share of total investment allotted to agriculture in the 11th Five-Year Plan. The Plan is not scheduled for presentation until the next party congress. (See Brezhnev's Report to the Central Committee, 3 July 1978.) [redacted]

Certain functions currently performed by Brezhnev have not always belonged to the party's senior secretary and will not pass automatically to the new general secretary. Neither Brezhnev nor Khrushchev held the post of supreme commander in chief of the Armed Forces at the beginning of his tenure; nor, apparently, did either initially hold the post of chairman of the Defense Council. Brezhnev's successor as general secretary might lay strong claim to both these posts on national security grounds by arguing a need in the missile-nuclear age for rapid decisionmaking authority. His claim would be reinforced if he were able to acquire Brezhnev's additional post of chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (virtual head of state), because, according to the 1977 Constitution (Article 121, Section 14), this body "forms the Council of Defense of the USSR and confirms its composition, appoints and dismisses the high command of the Armed Forces of the USSR." For this reason, and also because the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet has constitutional responsibilities in the area of foreign policy, the new general secretary might argue that it was necessary to keep the top posts in the party and the state conjoined. [redacted] 25X1

Although this arrangement has much to recommend it on organizational grounds, efforts to maintain it would probably be resisted in the Politburo, and this would aggravate the first phase of the succession. Judging from historical precedent, the new general secretary would be at a disadvantage in an early test of strength with Politburo opponents. Inasmuch as his failure to obtain the post of head of state, however, might leave the Soviet armed forces with a *collective* top command—with its potential disadvantages for the conduct of modern war and diplomacy—it is conceivable that high political and military officials responsible for national security might look favorably on a new general secretary's desire to become head of state. [redacted] 25X1

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The new general secretary may be obliged to make an early and perhaps fateful choice between two personal strategies: (1) to bid for both the party and state offices in an attempt to resolve the crisis of succession quickly; or (2) to assure his Politburo colleagues that he is content to remain the first among real equals, in which case intense political struggle might continue over a period of years, as has generally happened in the past. The success of the first strategy, as suggested above, might depend critically on support from key political leaders, particularly the heads of the Armed Forces (currently D. F. Ustinov) and of the KGB (currently Yu. V. Andropov). If the general secretary tried but failed to get the state post, he might be allowed to stay on in circumstances that severely circumscribed his authority, or he might be replaced as general secretary by a more accommodating leader. In either case, the outcome of such early maneuvering would probably be an unstable balance that would encourage intense factional struggle among the Politburo's members, which would make it difficult for the Politburo to adopt bold, unforced decisions.²

On the whole, it seems doubtful that institutionalization of the office of the general secretary has gone far enough to ease the transfer of Brezhnev's full powers to his heir. The new general secretary may not even retain Brezhnev's office inside the Kremlin, adjacent to the Politburo's meeting place, which is an important symbolic and substantive element of power that Brezhnev obtained only after seven years' tenure as general secretary. Whether he does or not, and whether or not he acquires the post of head of state, will provide important indicators of the extent the general secretary's powers have been degraded. In the unlikely event that the new general secretary did succeed in rapidly acquiring most of Brezhnev's current powers, the crisis of succession might not be deep. If so, the consequences of the Brezhnev succession for Soviet policy and institutions would largely depend on the views and the political character of the successor.

² A useful distinction here is that between *urgent* decisions forced by circumstances—such as whether to end the Korean War, which was decided upon after Stalin's death—and *unforced* decisions to initiate reforms and reorganization—such as the decision to reestablish the economic ministries, which required several months of debate following Khrushchev's removal.

Candidates for the Succession

As a result of Brezhnev's evident determination to hold on to power and to prevent the emergence of an able, ambitious, and experienced young leader as a logical heir, the circle of plausible candidates within the Politburo is small. Soviet and foreign observers have widened the circle somewhat with dubious members, while taking note of their liabilities. Yu. V. Andropov, for example, hardly fits the model of previous contenders: he has never been the responsible leader of a major territorial division; he bears the stigma of service in the security police;

V. V. Shcherbitskiy is another frequently listed as a leading contender. His Ukrainian ancestry, however, is a serious handicap in a contest for the succession, and he as yet lacks service in Moscow. G. V. Romanov and V. V. Grishin, the party bosses in Leningrad and Moscow, respectively, are plausible candidates even though they as yet have had no experience in the central party apparatus. Of the candidate members of the Politburo only M. S. Solomentsev, the head of the government of the Russian Republic, appears to be a likely candidate for the succession.

A recent arrival in the circle of candidates is K. U. Chernenko. In his capacity as head of the General Department, Chernenko has been known to the senior members of the Politburo, including A. P. Kirilenko, M. A. Suslov, and A. N. Kosygin, for almost 14 years. During this time his position relative to theirs has changed from one of marked inferiority to one of equality or superiority. Chernenko doubtless has performed his sensitive and demanding task well, but his rise from nonmembership of the Central Committee in 1965 to full member of the Politburo in 1978 is a reflection of the rise in Brezhnev's power and not a reward for brilliant accomplishment, or even for assuming major new political responsibilities. Further, a sharp change in the relations of senior leaders to Chernenko is bound to have caused resentment. Thus, while Suslov and Kosygin are still influential, their power is less than it was, and it appears to be on the decline. Ustinov, Andropov, and A. A. Gromyko, as heads of the national security bureaucracies, exercise considerable authority in implementing Brezhnev's policies, but it appears to be limited largely to the areas of their responsibility.

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Interlocking Directorate of the Soviet Leadership

Politburo	Date of		Secretariat	Council of Ministers	Presidium of Supreme Soviet
Full Member	Birth	Election		Members - •	Members - •
Brezhnev	12/19/06	6/29/57	Brezhnev - General Secretary		Brezhnev - Chairman
Andropov	6/15/14	4/27/73		• Andropov - KGB	
Chernenko	9/24/11	11/28/78	Chernenko - Leadership Documents		• Grishin
Grishin	9/18/14	4/09/71		• Gromyko - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
Gromyko	7/18/09	4/27/73			
Kirilenko	9/08/06	4/25/62	Kirilenko - Industry	Kosygin - Chairman	• Kuznetsov
Kosygin	2/21/04	5/04/60			• Romanov
Kunayev	1/12/12	4/09/71			• Shcherbitskiy
Pelshe	2/07/99	4/08/68			
Romanov	2/07/23	3/06/76			
Shcherbitskiy	2/17/18	4/09/71			
Suslov	11/21/02	7/12/55	Suslov - Ideology	• Ustinov - Ministry of Defense	
Ustinov	10/30/08	3/06/78			
Candidate					
Aliyev	5/10/23	3/06/76		• Demichev - Ministry of Culture	Kuznetsov - 1st Deputy Chairman
Demichev	1/03/18	11/01/64			• Masherov
Kuznetsov	2/13/01	10/03/77			
Masherov	2/13/18	4/08/66			
Ponomarev	1/17/05	5/19/72	Ponomarev - Non-ruling Communist Parties		• Rashidov
Rashidov	11/06/17	10/31/61			
Shevardnadze	01/25/28	11/28/78		• Solomentsev - RSFSR Premier	
Solomentsev	11/07/13	11/23/71		Tikhonov - 1st Deputy Chairman	
Tikhonov	5/14/05	11/28/78			
			Kapitonov - Cadres		
			Dolgikh - Industry		
			Zimyanin - Ideology		
			Ryabov - Defense Industry		
			Rusakov - Ruling CPs		
			Gorbachev - Agriculture		

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Chernenko has had abundant opportunity to acquire knowledge of substantive affairs in the Politburo during his 14-year tenure as its executive officer, although it is not known how much he has benefited. In the period ahead, if Brezhnev's health and mental faculties decline slowly, Chernenko will have further opportunity to master important affairs that are in the purview of the Politburo. If he has talents that have been obscured during the first 67 years of his life, the alter ego's power may grow as the principal's power wanes. If not—and this appears more likely—his power may be dissipated [redacted]

In such a circle of candidates Kirilenko, despite his age (72 on 8 September 1978), rank in the Politburo (fourth), and limited experience (particularly in foreign and defense policy), is a heavy favorite to succeed if Brezhnev leaves office in the near future. On the critical question of Kirilenko's capacity to consolidate power after becoming general secretary, the evidence available to us is sparse and murky. Moreover, even his colleagues in the Politburo may not be able to gauge him with confidence. It is useful to recall that Stalin grossly misjudged the relative capacities of G. M. Malenkov and Khrushchev, and that Khrushchev in turn thought N. V. Podgornyy could be relied on to counterbalance Brezhnev. Kirilenko has the appearance of a strong and demanding leader, and he has demonstrated shrewdness by prospering even in Brezhnev's shadow. Kirilenko must continue to walk a tightrope, showing his colleagues that he can think and act independently. If he can do this without losing Brezhnev's confidence, his prospects are good. True, an implausible contender might come to power if the circle of possible candidates stays as small as it is; moreover, time may still remain for Brezhnev to decide to make new arrangements for the succession. A further weakening of Brezhnev's physical stamina, however, would increase the likelihood of his sticking with Kirilenko. [redacted]

Should Kirilenko succeed Brezhnev, Chernenko's skill in managing the Politburo could be useful to Kirilenko's supporters in their efforts to consolidate the position of the general secretary, and perhaps also, though in less degree, to Kirilenko's opponents in their effort to limit Kirilenko's power and preserve the collectivity of the leadership. Both sides might be

suspicious of Chernenko's loyalties, however, and unless he had somehow acquired a traditional base of power (control of major provincial party organizations or powerful institutions), it is questionable that the large powers Brezhnev has conferred on Chernenko would outlast Brezhnev. If Brezhnev were forced from office, Chernenko's subsequent role in the leadership would probably depend on whether he had joined the conspiracy that ousted Brezhnev. If not, it seems doubtful that Chernenko could reach an accommodation with the new leadership as Podgornyy did in 1964.³ Podgornyy had close personal relations with leaders of the Ukrainian party organization, as well as powerful proteges in the central party staff. Chernenko at present apparently lacks such political assets. [redacted]

On balance, the elevation of Chernenko has strengthened the stability of the present Brezhnev leadership, but it seems doubtful that it will ease the succession. In fact, by further postponing the establishment of succession arrangements that would bring vigorous new leaders to the fore, Brezhnev has increased the likelihood that his succession will be troubled and disorderly. [redacted]

Strategy of the New General Secretary

What strategy the new general secretary will adopt to arrogate the historical powers of his office will significantly affect the course of the succession. Another crucial early decision that will confront him is whether to concentrate mainly on internal affairs in the first phase of the succession or to take on foreign affairs as well. Until now, new incumbents to the post have left most foreign policy matters to others, directing their attention chiefly to agriculture and to winning control of the party apparatus. It is possible, however, that foreign policy is now so important in Soviet politics that a new general secretary will give serious and immediate attention to that area. Not only do foreign affairs directly affect crucial assessments of military and foreign aid requirements, but an activist Soviet statesman has an opportunity to associate himself in the Soviet public mind with the nation's destiny. [redacted]

³ Chernenko's interest in such a project might be stimulated, however, by knowledge that his prospects of remaining in power after Brezhnev's departure would otherwise be poor.

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What the new general secretary's personal strategy will be with respect to involvement in foreign affairs may be strongly influenced by whether he has quickly acquired the office of chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. As head of state, Brezhnev's successor might be tempted to concentrate less on agriculture than did Khrushchev and Brezhnev, and to give an appreciable share of his attention to foreign policy. His overriding political concern, however, will almost certainly be to use the post of general secretary to extend his influence over the Secretariat, and in time over the party apparatus as well. [redacted]

Institutional Competition

There was serious competition between the government, headed by the Council of Ministers, and the party apparatus, headed by the Secretariat, in the Stalin succession and, to a lesser degree, in the Khrushchev succession. Similar competition can be expected in the Brezhnev succession. The distinctiveness of the two institutions has if anything been accentuated by the personnel policy of the Brezhnev regime. While transfers between the party and state bureaucracies are still common, cooptation of experienced economic managers to relatively high-level positions in the party apparatus has declined sharply since Khrushchev's ouster. Career-minded officials are even more aware than before that they can better satisfy their ambitions in the party apparatus than in the government. Leaders of the economic bureaucracy may have increased grounds to challenge the party apparatus, but their chances of success are not good. [redacted]

The hegemony of the party apparatus has lasted more than two decades and may now be even less vulnerable to attack. At present, the Council of Ministers lacks the necessary vigor and ambition to compete effectively with the party, or even to protect itself against encroachment by the Secretariat. Kosygin may not outlast Brezhnev, and his former "first deputies," Polyanskiy and Mazurov, have been ousted, leaving N. A. Tikhonov, an aged Brezhnev protege, as Kosygin's sole first deputy. If the economic bureaucracy acquires politically astute and ambitious young leaders in the next several years, however, it may succeed in mounting a serious challenge to the party apparatus. Failing this, the chief arena of struggle in the Brezhnev succession may be the Secretariat. [redacted]

Renewal of the Leadership

Khrushchev's heirs moderated the struggle for the succession by agreeing to limit the use of political purges and patronage to win supporters. As a consequence of this policy, the leadership has now become old, and its continuation poses increasingly difficult problems. Even if Brezhnev's successors do not strive to oust their opponents and advance their partisans, natural attrition of the leadership will compel them to replace numerous high officials who will have died or become incapacitated. More than one-third—specifically 105, or 37 percent—of the members of the Central Committee are more than 65 years old.⁴ Unless such vacancies continue to be filled by promotion on the basis of seniority, as has been the case throughout most of the Brezhnev period, new appointments are bound to bring political confrontations that will test the power of individuals and factions in the Politburo. [redacted]

In addition to the effect of natural attrition on high-level politics, the obvious need to rejuvenate the leadership could lead the Politburo to adopt general rules for retiring aging Central Committee members below the Politburo level. The application of such rules to particular cases and the consequent need to make additional appointments would probably increase political controversy. Since these are matters that the Politburo decides, the balance of forces in the Politburo will be decisive. Perhaps only a stalemate in the Politburo would permit continuation of the present policy that gives tenure to members and ordinarily replaces incapacitated members with their most senior subordinates. It seems doubtful, however, that a Politburo stalemate would be prolonged, particularly since natural attrition will be high in the Politburo itself, where the average age is 70. Only two of the 13 Politburo members are less than 64 years of age; six are between 64 and 70; three are over 75. In previous successions, Politburo membership has been stable in the early years; extensive changes in the Politburo have usually followed large changes in the Central Committee. In the Brezhnev succession, however, substantial changes in the composition of the Politburo may come about by natural attrition early in the succession. A

⁴ Considerable natural attrition may occur before Brezhnev's departure, and the attrition rate is likely to remain high for some years to come.

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